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THE CIA

Damn the Leakers—Full Ahead!

"How do you operate a Government in this climate?" CIA Director William E. Colby asked resignedly last week. Colby was frustrated because congressional sources had leaked information he had given them in secret, making front-page news out of the U.S. plan to contribute \$6 million to anti-Communist parties in Italy (see *WORLD*). When it was suggested that the CIA should give up such covert operations, Colby asked: "You mean hamstringing ourselves and watch the world go to pieces?"

The leak dramatically illustrated the difficulties that Congress and the Administration face in working out guidelines for legislative oversight of the CIA. The decision to help finance anti-Communist forces in Italy was strongly endorsed by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Said a Government official: "Henry's attitude toward this one has been 'Damn the congressional critics and leakers—full steam ahead!'".

Kissinger and Colby had plenty of precedents. Since the late '40s, the U.S. has heavily backed Italian politicians

opposed to Communism, just as the Soviet Union has supported Red candidates over the years. Compared with the funds that the U.S. sent to Italy in the past, the \$6 million amounted to small potatoes.

Angry Ford. Under a 1974 measure requiring the CIA to tell Congress about its covert operations, Colby briefed six separate House and Senate committees in December about the agency's plans for Italy. The leak sprang quickly. On Dec. 26, the McClatchy newspaper chain in California reported part of the story, which attracted no attention. Following their own leads, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published more detailed versions last week. President Ford authorized Press Secretary Ron Nessen to describe him as "angry" about the leak.

Colby and Kissinger are convinced that 1) the U.S. must continue to conduct some clandestine operations abroad, and 2) it is impossible to carry out such missions if Congress, once briefed, reveals them to the press. (For Colby's views on the CIA's role, see following interview.)

In an effort to reduce the likelihood of a leak, Senator Frank Church's intelligence committee will recommend to Congress that the CIA be required to brief only two new committees—one in

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the House and one in the Senate—set up to oversee agency operations. A more significant and perplexing question is how much power Congress should have to stop CIA plans that it opposes. There is already a consensus on Church's committee that Congress, once informed of the CIA's plans, should have veto power over its operations—a feeling that is bound to rouse strong opposition from the Administration.

In addition to these basic issues, other key questions involving the CIA will confront the new session of Congress. The agency argues that last month's assassination of Richard S. Welch, the CIA station chief in Athens, resulted from the printing of his name by the *Fifth Estate*, a Washington-based group dedicated to exposing covert U.S. intelligence activities. Colby favors a law that would make it a crime for a former CIA employee to reveal secrets he learned at the agency. But liberals in Congress and most journalists are certain to oppose any such sweeping gag rule.

As early as next month, President Ford plans to deliver a major address setting forth his own guidelines for the intelligence community and its relations with Congress. Clearly, Congress should oversee the work of the agency to prevent any abuses of power. Even more clearly, the secret spending of U.S. funds to bolster democratic parties abroad, especially those threatened by foreign-financed Communist parties, is the kind of covert action the CIA should be able to undertake on a selective basis.